

The Grand Kindness

~

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Somehow the footman manages to find you. Lady --- welcomes you warmly, and offers you tea from a tiny table. She is an attractive and elegant woman, sensible, sensitive, with a soft, gentle way of speech and action, which is all the more charming, as she is tall.

Dinner very good. Menu written in pencil on a porcelain card, with the formula in gilt and a coronet. In the morning you go to church with the family. Church is prettily dressed with oats, flowers, grass, and grapes, the last being substituted for hops, not in season. The offerings are for the Bulgarians, for everything now in England is tinged with Turkish horrors.

(THE PRIEST:

Until noon you lie abed
hatching concupiscence then
having paid your adorations
to the ugly idol in the glass
you descend to dinner

where you gourmandize enough
at one meal to famish a town besieged.
Home you come in a railing humor,
and at last give us nothing
for supper but a butter'd bun.

How Lady are we to offer
That thundering execution which your expectations exact?)

-

Lord --- is grown a little stouter and graver since you met him in New York. His drawing room, though handsome and cheerful, is nothing to thousands of rooms around Washington Square. But he's just the same frank, simple fellow you shot with on Long Island in old times. He's so cool, he's a lord.

--

In the night you hear voices:

Washing clothes is hard isn't it
Is going out shopping hard?

-

Lady --- extends her hand to you, and asks if nine is too early for breakfast. You're tempted to say that it is. You're tempted to remove your clothes and hers. And the clothes of gentry unmet and unborn, especially the ones with such and such—especially the ones whose Grecian temples have been turned into teashops. You wish you knew the accepted style. Is there still time to be a college lesbian, or are you just a regular one now? You wish you could spring out the window and say how-do-ye-do to all those sweet-eyed cows, the ones who appear in the pastures when you look at them and vanish when you don't. Or learn how to do one thing at once.

--

Listen, listen!
I had a dream. I ate a potato.
And I was studying at school.

Well well that was just the entry hall now let's go to the butler's room.

On the desk is a play. It's like well it reminds me of Dutch painting no one can tell whether it's been dead for four centuries or not ha ha. If you read it you'd like it a lot. It's like the bow of a woman of charm or the kind of present one sends when the bride is an orphan, or the feeling you get when someone puts his hands on your shoulders and murmurs, "Just do your best and later we'll all have snacks." (You hate it AND you love it.)

In general it's like a museum with too many trustees. But perhaps it most closely resembles the barn cat you found frozen stiff dead that one winter. Or the hay that covered her or the bugs that et her. Or the solemnity that wafted up from her and enrobed you like a stink. What I mean to say is, it's a lot like suddenly being tackled by someone you really like. The playwright finally learned to stop writing what she always wrote about, and also put more girls in, because she wanted to help people. Or wanted to want to.

-

The mirror is covered

The butler has covered the mirror. Believing that mirrors are abominable. Mirrors being abominable for increasing the number of men (this being once read in the most caliginous of tomes). When the butler passes the other mirrors in the house—the ones he dares not ask Lady --- to allow him to cover—he looks down at the carpet and tries to think about the godhead.

So the butler never sees the three-legged cat who lives in it. If he'd raised the curtain she would have flashed him a toothy smile and beckoned him to follow her. She would have taken him to the city buried beneath the hollow tree, she would have given him a pointy hat with a fistful of feathers stuck in the brim. Together they would have solved the mystery of where the twelve dancing sisters danced at night (the mystery that has taken the lives of so many young men, that mystery of which I speak). Afterward he would have taken for his wife the youngest sister—the most useful and most moral—and the buildings of the city would have hovered over them like ghosts as he introduced her to the facts of life—vigorously, but also with consideration for whether she was liking it or just counting fishermen. “That was a fine flock of storks” “Yes so it was dear” even though they were swans really.

The stars are black and the sky is white and the city itself is white – this makes it invisible. No one in the city is better than they ought to be but everyone is pleased to know you. On the third Tuesday of the month they

gather to hear the elder give a fine speech about community and then walk around picking up trash. And the earth yields plentiful increases to all of their painful labors.

Now play the recording of the two cats licking the fur off each others' stomachs and being slathered with castor oil.

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. .
. .
. .

Excellent.

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. .
. .

yeah that's

.
. .
. .
. .

OK that's enough thanks. And we continue to the first staircase with its handsome walnut banister and its classically simple moldings. Beyond the diamond-paned casement window it seems always to be World War II or the Boer War, or some other carnage-on-spats uh thing. Beyond this window and the others the sheep to person ratio is anywhere between three and ten, depending on the authority consulted; the sheep are let out at dusk to trim the lawns in their thoughtful way and through the dimness you can hear them munching in all their crepuscular glory.

(Music:

The sheep have radiant personalities
The sheep love England the sheep are blessed

The sheep have radiant smiles
The sheep love life in their way)

Excuse me Mister Sheep—

I forget what the sheep were going to say, but one of them seems to be giving the other a look that says, “Hey, I don’t have time for you to lose things and for me to run around looking for them getting all stressed out.” The other sheep is looking at his hooves looking well hey sheepish. “Why do we raise females to believe they’re here to dampen male optimism?” I think is what he looks like.

Crunchy sheep munching with all their smells blowing through and the thyme you can stuff in their joints in their thighs.

Advancing down the corridor we come to the unused guestroom where Aunt Milly died. The bars on the windows are made of wrought iron and were originally painted green. The antimacassar is stuffed with horsehair and covered in blue velvet. The coverlet is of a most ingenious design. The fabrics in it have all been cut out of the gowns of former debutantes. See here the stain from sweet ices; see here the sweat of antique aspirations. The rug is a green shag and it is hideous. The vanity was made by a six-fingered Mennonite and it, too, is hideous.

The sconces really are nothing to speak of. The bell-pull is made out of yellow braid. The room gets a little cold at night but the fireplace is capacious and effective. The mirror is hexagonal, with a border of herons painted onto a gold background. The ghost of Aunt Milly is said to appear in it when the lights are out, or if not Aunt Milly whomever else one knows who is dead, blinking at you. Here’s the last nightstand that Aunt Milly saw. Here’s her antimacassar—antimacassar ultimo! Here’s the feeble English sunlight drained through curtains soaked in chlorine. Here’s Aunt Milly’s nightgown—why doesn’t anyone throw it away? Here are Aunt Milly’s slippers, please someone throw them away. Please throw her hairpins away. Here are Aunt Milly’s stuffed dinosaurs, why

haven't you drowned them in the lake? Please cycle her slot machine winnings back into the local economy (buy some pies and bury them). And take this jumper she made with the six googly eyes and feed it to the Nigerian dwarf goats or to the hermit in the hermitage. Thanks. Thanks so much. The wallpaper is hideous, it's different species of birds in flight. Audubon tells a funny story about this bird involving a pulley, a nest, and gravity. People almost die and it's set in olden times.

In the master bedroom a bowl of oranges on the table. You don't know why, but you feel happy, don't you? To see the oranges in their bowl. And I am happy too to see that slight glow and those dimples. The baseball game on the television set may be trying to teach us some sad message about life, but these oranges are teaching us about paradise. I feel like "a weary traveler sitting down" and I feel like I'm going to die, but in addition I feel reverence for something essential having to do with human dignity. When I see them oranges. Also on the table there's a coffeepot, a bulb of garlic, a glass of water, and two or three sprigs of fennel left by a confused painter or a sloppy servant. Let's clear that shit off, OK?

The quilt on the bed tells the story of our time and of the first golden age of mortals, as well as of the markedly inferior but still honored silver age. The tapestries with the bumblebees are allegorical and tell the story of an ancient society that somehow went from barbarism to decadence without "civilization" in between (to quote that one guy). Isn't that funny it's a little funny. I guess.

In an enamel frame on the bedside table there's a photograph of the last time Inclination and Aptitude shook hands. Aptitude is smiling tightly her hair swept back. She looks like someone whose stuffed animals were abused. And Inclination trying so hard to please, beaming out at us fingering her ringlets. Aptitude's eyes are dark and full of promise but looking somewhere outside the frame. She wants a cigarette and votes for women. They're both waiting to be delighted I guess—maybe they're waiting for their bosses' boss to stick his hands up their shirts.

I ran into Inclination on the street once. She had her hair back in a ponytail and beautiful wrists. She laughed at everything I said. I liked that a lot. We talked about Aptitude the erratic slut—or at least I did? Inclination had her head cocked to one side and was peering at me looking at the large black plastic stitches on my skull. I wonder where they were when they both up and died.

Hey let's get into bed everyone. Everyone let's get into bed. Come on you baby camels, little hippos, and retarded elephants: nine out of ten charming poets agree that we should all get into bed! Or no let's go on with the play. Sigh let's go on with the play (and then get in the bed).

-

Accidentally in the butler's room again. The play on the desk has changed and now it resembles hum well various achievements of 18th-century royal spun sugar sculpture?— a boat, a dead stag, or a miniature basket of cucumbers and cauliflowers. Has the butler learned to worship the goddess of revision? The play's a lot like bad poetry now. You almost get the feeling that it didn't want to be written down. Someone has stamped "Be calm! There is nothing to fear" at the top of every page. Where do I get a stamp like that? My favorite part now is the scene where the feisty but vulnerable heroine presents her lover with the completely boring cufflinks, or the part where the guy mails himself not to escape from slavery but for no reason at all!

The library

The more books you have the safer you are. Custom-made leather doohickeys to keep the dust off the books? Those make you extra safe. What's good is to organize them into nonfiction, poetry, drama, American fiction, British fiction, maybe something alluded to vaguely as "world" fiction, then crappy books you got for free, old weird books full of portentous quotations about America, and finally big books of frescoes or folk concepts of outer space. And what's good then is to prop up gilt

bronzes and Oriental objects on little round marble tables and hang a portrait of St. Francis receiving the stigmata over the fireplace. This room would be a great place for someone to get murdered. I can just see it happening in a really interesting way.

Because you are a famous writer. You are so very famous. You chat up young women and wave your scotch around, avuncular and sly. Have-you-seen-my-new or did-you-know-I-was? With a set of things you say about things. Guest editing this and that. You promise to run away with them to where the traffic lights play music but they know you're a parson with no divinity.

Anyhow I knew a poet once who was up on one of these ladders when he felt himself falling backward. "Well this is it," he thought. But landed on the couch. But his thought was so banal that his hosts ripped out all the parquet and put in this trampoline. The poet was heir to his family's grocery store fortune and everyone hoped he'd marry their daughters who were trying to break into the talkies. They even made him call them in front of me.

Er can we play that recording again

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. .
. .
. .
. .
. .

yeah it just keeps getting better

.
. .
. .

full of CRUNK

--

The red drawing room

Above the doorway to this room is a sculpture of a horse rearing up with its eyes closed, the highest-relief frieze known to have survived from Trajan's time. Note the flared nostrils and drooping jaw. The nude rider falling off the horse is a relatively modern addition; its oddly unperturbed expression is typical of the mid-to-late nineteenth or twentieth centuries.

Let's get serious. The vaulted ceiling was painted by "three men in blouses from Paris," according to the records of the Bachelor Duke. He'd asked for Orpheus looking back at Eurydice but they couldn't figure out how to make her disappear, and, hearts gripped with other visions, painted the interior of a beloved saucisserie on the Rue de Vaugirard. The finished work was considered obscene. It was rumored that any lady who glanced up was immediately stricken with bilious vapors. This filled the Bachelor Duke's heart with great delight and he would often chuckle tenderly to himself as he sat by the fire with his cognac drawing picture after picture of the birds that flitted through his dreams.

Footsteps

The divan is upholstered in watered silk—

Door

—not quite white, it's what some would call "hussy white" —

Felicia enters

(Embarrassed pause)

--Oh hello

--Oh hello what are you doing

--Oh you know I'm just

--Yes

Lady --- enters

--Oh there you are
--Good evening Lady ---
--Good evening
--Nicholas was just showing me
--I was just explaining about the silk
--He was just explaining

Lady -- opens the curtain

--Oh that horrid ceiling
--It's remarkable
--Really Lady ---
--Please I beg you don't speak to me about it I keep
asking Harold if we can paint over it but he says it's
"historic"
--Oh indeed

Lord --- enters

--What's this about the ceiling I don't
give a damn what Ruskin said about it
--(The nastiest things)
--That ill-tempered fairy
--Why don't you offer our guests a drink
--Don't try to change the subject woman
--Really Harold (I apologize)
--A goddamn fairy
--(It's the only thing we argue about)
--I'll be dead before you paint over this ceiling
--No one is planning anything of the kind

--Excuse me sir Mr. C and Mrs. C
--Please show them in

Mr. C and Mrs. C enter

--How delightful to see you
--So sorry we're late
--Not at all
--We were just talking about the ceiling
--Oh?
--About the ceiling you know
--Oh the ceiling
--What do you think
--It's very modern. Very uh Pre-Raphaelite?
--What, the sausages?
--(Dinner is served)
--Shall we go in

--(Don't be nasty)
--(I'm not being)
--(You're a horrible snob just because she)

--So kind of you to invite us Lady ---
--Not at all how was Venice
-- divine

Lights go up on a brilliantly appointed dinner table in a brilliantly appointed dining room. Gas in globes on the walls and some murderous-looking portraits.

Lady ---

Harold. Won't you say grace?

Lord ---

Gracious Lord

Lord! Ha that's me too

Lady ---

Harold

Lord ---

Gracious Lord

You are neither hot nor cold. I wish that you were either hot or cold. But because you are lukewarm I will spit you out of my mouth.

You are neither soft nor firm. I wish that you were either soft or firm. But because you are some strange half-cooked-apple-like consistency I will spit you out of my mouth.

You are neither sick nor well. I wish that you were either well or sick. You're neither hot nor cold, tired or awake. You are neither sick nor well. I will spit you out of my mouth.

I wish that you were either cold or well, hot or firm, soft or sick. Because you are none of these I will spit you out of my mouth. I—

Lady ---

Amen.

All

Amen.

Felicia

That was bee-yoo-ti-ful

Lady ---

Please don't encourage him

Felicia

No really what was it from Revelations?

Lord ---
No idea

Felicia
That's my third-favorite book

Nicholas
Your third-favorite

Felicia
Yes the first is Clarissa
The second

Mrs. C
Yes?

Mr. C
(Sarah)

Felicia
The second I don't know what the second is actually.
But the third is definitely Revelations

Lady ---
How do you like your room, Felicia?

Felicia
Oh very well

Lord ---
If you don't like it, you can march down to the village tomorrow morning
and send yourself a telegram. But as a good guest you must never betray
the slightest hint of dissatisfaction to your hosts.

Felicia
I would never dream of it

Lord ---

I've sent myself countless telegrams

Felicia

It has everything I would wish for

Lord ---

I even have a little act prepared

Felicia

Plenty of hangers

Lord ---

Just to give it that extra fillip

Felicia

But no shutters that bang

Lady ---

Really Harold, please

Lord ---

Hearken to this young lady and learn

Lady ---

Don't

Lord ---

clutching his heart

Aurgghhh! Millicent!!

Mrs. C

I say

Lord ---

It's so beautifully plausible

I say Mrs. C

Sarah... Mr. C

I say! Mrs. C

..... Lord ---

... Lady ---

Well of course Lord ---

(well done Harold oh very well done) Lady ---

Nicholas
I hear you've just returned from Venice, Mrs. C

... Mrs. C

I hear it's lovely Nicholas

I hear it's a little damp Felicia

Oh yes. Yes it certainly is Mr. C

Mrs. C

Something to do with being built on a salt marsh

Mr. C

But the air, the air is very damp as well, wouldn't you say Sarah

Mrs. C

Oh indeed Richard

Nicholas

You know there's the most extraordinary fruit in my room

Lady –

I'm so pleased you noticed

Felicia

I've always wanted to go there

Mr. C

You really must go

Mrs. C

Why must she?

Nicholas

I think it actually glows—

Lady ---

Yes we have it flown in specially from the eighteenth-century France

Mr. C

The art. The culture

Nicholas

Most extraordinary

Mrs. C

Oh that

Lady ---

Harold considers it terribly extravagant don't you darling

Lord ---

Well well

Lady --

I'd only advise you not to get too close because the colors might start disintegrating

--

In the corner of the attic there's a doll that the Japanese make for their old people. Whose doll is this and why is its button broken?

Listen, listen!

I had a dream. I ate a potato.

And I was studying at school.

The sky is so good and big.

Is going out shopping hard?

Washing clothes is hard, isn't it?

Why are bunnies' eyes red?

To see their prey better. Please throw it away before the conversation takes a literary turn

Mrs. C

The whole concept of the loss of innocence...it's always really great to see that. It's so hard to shock these days.

Nicholas

Uh huh

Mrs. C

I really feel that “with every naked trope and suspended moment of playful insinuation” your prose “weaves a modulated path into the interior of the Self”

Nicholas

Yeah

Yeah

Yeah I try to be ten years ahead of my time

Like Pynchon

Mrs. C

Mmmm

Felicia

I would love to read your work

Mrs. C

Oh you read? I thought you just wandered around

Nicholas

I would be delighted but I should warn you

Lord ---

What’s that you write eh Rogers? Fishing manuals

Nicholas

Not quite sir

Lord ---

Well what

Mrs. C

It’s so hard to describe these things isn’t it

Nicholas

It's like

Lord ---

Come out with it or pack your hairbrush and your bone and get out of here

Nicholas

The characters all follow a peculiar moral system of my own devising

Lord ---

What do you mean

Nicholas

Where the only thing that keeps them from doing things is the horror being a certain kind of person

Lord ---

What jewish

Nicholas

Not exactly

Lord ---

Half-jewish

Nicholas

They're the sort who wake up and realize how their life as modern people—how their experiences are wide but shallow—not narrow and deep like (say) a serf. They think, "Oh if I were a serf it would be very different. I'd be a serf and that would be that."

Mrs. C

Nick is brilliant he wins *awards*

Lord ---

Bolshevik eh

Nicholas

Maybe I'm not expressing myself correctly—

Mrs. C

A most promising young man

Lord ---

Hum! Hum.

Butler

Poulet demi-deuille

Felicia

My favorite, these truffles!

Lord ---

We have no heirs

In the china anteroom

This charming anteroom just off the breakfast parlour houses the estate's remarkable collection of fine china and tea services. The pattern you see housed under this crystal dome is called Whispering Babylon. The surface of the plate is first divided into six circles as it revolves on a modeling stand. Four transverse lines are then added. In the innermost circle an imaginary blue and yellow pheasant is painted surrounded by small leaves. The grass is then painted as narrow lines radiating from the central field. The four outer fields are occupied by a stylized clover-leaf, a chrysanthemum, the seven architectural wonders of Texas, and a trio of angels with blue wings and faces, also highly stylized. Finally various details are added to provide the decoration with fullness and life. The elaborate and intricate overglaze decorations on the rim contain more than 700 wild plants in their patterns, all culled from the old encyclopaedia "Flora Danica." The pattern looks disarmingly simple but a single salad plate requires over two thousand brush strokes and takes a group of ten mentally disabled Dutch children working in shifts over four years to complete. However, this set is used only on special occasions.

On the east wall hang various highlights of a set that was presented to the third Duke by the British people on the occasion of his engagement to Miss Honoria Pidcock. The set was hand-painted in Delft and illustrates various scenes from The Man-Eaters of Tsavo by J.H. Patterson, widely known to be the Duke's favorite book. The captions, painted on the back of each plate beneath the Royal Doulton insignia, read (from left to right):

- 1) "The best way to get there . . . was by gharri "
- 2) "A lucky shot brought down the huge bird"
- 3) The tent from which jemadar Ungan Singh was carried off
- 4) Head of the first Man-Eater
- 5) "We shared a hut of palm leaves and boughs"
- 6) The two wounded coolies were left where they lay, a piece of torn tent having fallen over them

- 7) "Such was my cook, Mabruki"
- 8) "I caught sight of a fine waterbuck and successfully bowled him over"
- 9) "I got near enough for a safe shot, which bowled the antelope over. The antelope was stone-dead"
- 10) "It never moved again"
- 11) "Spooner's plucky servant, Imam Din"
- 12) Wart-hog
- 13) Hippo Head
- 14) "Beyond all doubt, the man-eaters' den!"
- 15) He was kept on view for several days, and then shot
- 16) "The mighty river stretching away to the north amid enchanting scenery"

Here's a story that can only be fully appreciated by priestesses who walk in the wilderness chanting poetry until they move themselves to tears. An Indian prince who believed in ceaseless wakefulness accidentally fell asleep. When he awoke he was so disgusted that he cut off his own eyelids. He threw them on the ground, where they sprouted into the first tea shrub.

What you want to listen to the people talk you pussies? Is that what you want, them to talk to each other? Pussies.

Felicia

I've never had pets

Lady ---

How unfortunate

Felicia

Except for the two dogs and the golden parakeet

Mr. C

A fascinating bird

Lady ---
You must get a pug!

Mr. C
And much lamented

Lady –
I would be desolate without Mackenzie Mackenzerton

Lord –
Dogs are food not pets woman

Lady –
My pug, Mackenzie Mackenzerton

Mrs. C
We had a pet mouse once but

Mr. C
Sarah let's not—

Mrs. C
It got a tumor its name was cupcake

Felicia
Oh I'm sorry how dreadful

Lord ---
Demmed silly name

Mrs. C
Naturally we decided to put it out of its misery

Lady ---
Yes oh dear yes

Lord ---

How did you do it stepped on it I suppose

Mrs. C

Of course you know in some places they kill mice by drowning them

Mr. C

Really Sarah

Felicia

How dreadful

Mrs. C

Or in others they kill them with poison

Felicia

Dear me oh dear

Mrs. C

Or with traps

Mr. C

I'm sure our friends

Mrs. C

But apparently where Richard's from they take them out to the back porch
and shoot them with twelve-gauge rifles

Lady ---

.....

.....

Nicholas

Felicia

Yes
Felicia

I think you mentioned
Nicholas

Oh yes
Felicia

You mentioned you were helping your parents with the landscaping
around their cottage
Nicholas

Oh yes. Yes I am
Felicia

Won't you tell us about it
Nicholas

Oh certainly
Felicia

Huhhhh
Mrs. C

Well the other day we were out walking
Felicia

Please excuse me
Mrs. C

Scraping of chairs
Pause
She exits

So....Felicia you were telling us
Nicholas

The landscaping

Felicia

Yes. The other day...we were walking my parents and I
and we saw some rocks with quartzite in them.

Some good-sized rocks –

mica, granite, quartzite, very good rocks, big ones

Nicholas

Oh yes

Lady ---

(Chick chick chick chick rrrrrrrrr)

Felicia

So we're going to bring them over and we're going to make one of
those rock gardens that rich people pay a lot of money for to have rocks
brought in

but with our *own* rocks

Nicholas

Oh, great

Mr. C

Spiffing

Nicholas

Really, ah, yes quite

Mr. C

Zen.

Lady ---

Zen?

Very Zen. Very!

Mr. C

Oh thank you.

Felicia

Excuse me

Chair scraping
She exits
Pause

Yes excuse me as well

Mr. C

Wait for them in the study around the corner. This is also called the Leather Room. It's really hot. It's really, really hot. Everything is covered in leather. The books are covered in leather. The chairs and tables are covered in leather. The walls are covered in leather.

--Felicia!

--Yes oh oh

Running

Felicia

Mr. C

What do you want?

Felicia

Felicia I

Mr. C

Felicia

You're married. Everyone's so married now

Mr. C

I remember everything about you. I remember the name of your favorite artist. She makes loopy things with string. They attempt to crystallize harmony by creating architectural landscapes of internal perspective. It's H.. H something. Hinkey?

Felicia

No

Mr. C

Fuck it. Send me the letter no woman should ever write

Felicia

Mr. C absolutely not

Mr. C

Or help me find the good parts in Augustine

Felicia

I'm just a little side-dish of a person

Mr. C

I want to repeat the grand kindness to you
I want the princes of spain

Felicia

This conversation is over!

She runs away

Mr. C

I want the princes of spain to be forced to issue a decree commanding me not to repeat the grand kindness to you more than nine times a night

The exhibit in this room invites us to imagine we are cocoa beans. "Imagine you are a cocoa bean" and there are oceans of credulity you don't know about. Imagine a hand about the same color as you shaking you off the tree. Imagine the long weeks you spend fermenting and drying in a burlap-lined trough under the hot Bolivian sun. Imagine the beany thoughts you'd think.

Now imagine being blasted with hot air and shaken and winnowed and pulverized. Imagine a candy bar that appeals less to our sweet teeth than to the active lifestyles of today.

You were waiting for me on the sofa in the library. I went to the window. I looked at the sheep. They regarded me.

Lord ---

I give the Cs six months

Lady ---

Harold really

Lord ---

Young couples who consistently arrive late to social functions it's a sure sign. Eh Rogers

Nicholas

I quite agree sir

Lady ---

Nonsense

Lord ---

Eh! Becky!

Lady ---

What is it Harold?!

Lord ---

Oh, for a second I thought your arm looked big

Mrs. C

Here I am, did I miss anything?

Lady ---

No nothing

Lord ---

Nothing. Have some wine

Mrs. C

I think I saw Winston Churchill in one of your mirrors

Lady ---

Oh? How did he look

Mrs. C

Gouty

Lady ---

Yes

A scream
A thump as though of a corpse
falling from behind a door

Everyone dashes out

In the library

We foretold this and it came true. There are too many andirons for it not to have happened. And dark signs rippling over the surface of the play, like that stained kid glove lying on the floor in the part where I was talking about Aunt Milly, or the moment when Lady --- in her promenade dress bent over to look through the keyholes of ten doors and, looking, saw daylight at the end. Like money we loved it because it represented a thing that was the real thing we loved.

This room seems like a good place for starting a revolution—for wearing berets and believing that we can figure it all or most of it all out. For example: how to get to know people without dating them. For another: whether the robots will really come. If we don't run out of wine, maybe we'll make it to Old Business. Item: Under what four circumstances is it permissible to shoot a Welshman in the knee? Item. How does one know that one has acquired the ability to make decisions? Let's make sure those items make it onto the next agenda, Kelly and KK, Sibyl and Scott.

Lord ---

Poor Richard. He would never have set the Thames on fire

Lady ---

May he rest.

Lord ---

Lucky that Rogers is a writer and an inspector

Lady ---

Yes indeed

Lord ---

And Felicia a delicious young crumpet, but also an inspector

Lady ---

Yes oh yes

Lord ---

And even Mrs. C is an amateur sleuth, as is our butler and as are the chandler, the maltster, and the yeomen of the pastry

Lady ---

Yes both of them

Lord ---

I trust that mystery will soon be abolished and justice restored to the world

Pause

She holds his hand

Lord ---

I wonder what his face looked like when the angel with the blue wings and face held out its hands

Pause

Lady ---

Let's pretend you're going off to war. I'm going to stay here and milk the cows with the machines. I'm a milkmaid. We had sex three times last night. Usually it's not that much. This is our last breakfast.

Pause

Let's go up to the Astronomy Room, which is also a greenhouse and an aviary. In this fragile room the architect with characteristic disregard of law thought to combine classical severity with the fancifulness natural in a northerner and a playwright, positioning the windows so that one could see the young people getting drunk and running around the estate's fashionably naturalistic gardens. There's a radio one can turn on to hear them uttering grand young things. Or just look out the window to see them running around the fountain that the Tsar never arrived to see, their fingers fluttering like flags over their amazing yoga-toned bodies.

The room houses among its many horticultural wonders several blades of grass still quivering from the divine touch, and among its many birds a condor that can fit a whole human head in its mouth and make it feel real safe. This bird is far from its home in the salt fields of Asia Minor. It is perhaps best known for its inability to tell the difference between lightning and someone taking a picture.

Play the recording again

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